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Psalm 95

Labuschagne, C.J.

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Psalm 95— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#) and [Book IV](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the [Key to the charts](#).

Specific features of Psalm 95

- The exhortation of the prophet (vs. 1-7) and the 34-word oracle (vs. 8-11) define the major sections (cantos) of Psalm 95 in a natural way. Being an address to an audience in which a divine speech is quoted, it is very reminiscent of Psalm 81 and 91.
- A striking feature is the conspicuous correspondence – with respect to both form and content - between **Ps. 95:8-11** and six passages in the Psalter (Pss. 77:8-12, 95:8-11, 81:9-12, 105:40-44, 106:23-27, 107:23-26 + 40), and four in the book of Deuteronomy: 1:35-36 and 1:38-39, and 7:5-6 and 7:25-26). All ten are composed according to the formula **34=19+15** (or **15+19**), and all deal explicitly - or implicitly - with the all-important issue of the promised land: the entrance into, or loss of the land through apostasy.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-5 || 6-7, 8-9, 10-11 (2 cantos, 5 strophes, 11 verselines and 25 cola, taking vs. 6-7a and 7b-d as two tricola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7c || 7d-9, 10-11 (2 stanzas, 5 strophes, 12 verselines and 24 cola, regarding vs. 6 and 7a-c as two bicola, and v. 7d as a separate verseline which he combines with vs. 8-9 to form Strophe 4).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7 || 8-9, 10-11 (2 cantos, 5 strophes, 11 verselines, 25 cola, following Van der Lugt in taking 6-7a and 7b-d as two tricola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the main clauses; **d**: words in the subordinate clauses.
- **Total**: the numbers of words spoken about God are in **red**; those of the oracle in **green**.
- The numbering of the verselines in **brown** and **green** displays the pattern 11 = 7 + 4.

			Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְכוּ נִרְנֶנָּה לַיהוָה ^א	1	3	3		3	
	נְרִיעָה לְצֹר יִשְׁעֵנוּ:		3		3	3	
	Total, v. 1		6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
2	נִקְדָּמָה פָּנֵינוּ בְּתוֹדָה ^א	2	3	3		3	
	בְּזִמְרוֹת נְרִיעַ לֹא:		3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2		6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2		12	= 6	+ 6	= 12	+ 0
3	כִּי אֵל גָּדוֹל יִהְיֶה ^א	3	4	4			4
	וּמֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים:		5		5		5
	Total, v. 3		9	= 4	+ 5	= 0	+ 9
4	אֲשֶׁר בִּידוֹ מַחְקְרֵי-אָרֶץ ^א	4	4	4			4
	וְתוֹעֲפּוֹת הַיָּם לֹא:		3		3		3
	Total, v. 4		7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7
5	אֲשֶׁר-לֹא הָיָם וְהוּא עֹשֶׂהוּ ^א	5	5	5			5
	וַיִּבְשֹׁת יָדָיו יָצְרוּ:		3		3		3
	Total, v. 5		8	= 5	+ 3	= 0	+ 8
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-5		24	= 13	+ 11	= 0	+ 24

Total, v. 1-5		36 = 19 + 17 = 12 + 24
6 Middle verseline (6-7a): באו נשתחווה ונכרעה	6	3 3 3
11 = 5 + 1 + 5 נברכה לפני יהוה עשנו:		4 4 4
7a Middle colon: 25=12+1+12 כי הוא אלהינו		3 3 3
words: 89 = 43 + 3 + 43 ואנחנו עם מרעיתו וצאן ידיו	7	3 3 3
היום אם-בקלו תשמעו:		2 2 2
Strophe 3 Total, v. 6-7		4 4 4
Words spoken about God: Canto I, v. 1-7		19 = 11 + 8 = 11 + 8
		55 = 30 + 25 = 23 + 32
The boundary between the Prophet's Exhortation and YHWH's Oracle		
8 אל-תקשו לבבכם כמריבה	8	4 4 4
כיום מסה במדבר:		3 3 3
Total, v. 8		7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0
Total, v. 6-8		26 = 15 + 11 = 18 + 8
9 אשר נסוני אבותיכם	9	3 3 3
בחנוני גם-ראו פעלי:		4 4 4
Total, v. 9		7 = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7
Strophe 4 Total, v. 8-9		14 = 7 + 7 = 7 + 7
Total, v. 7-9		26 = 15 + 11 = 11 + 15
10 Vs. 8-10b ¹ ארבעים שנה אקוט בדור	10	4 4 4
Admonitory Oracle: ואמר עם תעי לבב הם		5 5 5
19 words והם לא-ידעו דרכי:		4 4 4
Total, v. 10		13 = 9 + 4 = 13 + 0
11 Divine Resolution אשר-נשבתי באפי	11	3 3 3
quoted: 15 words אם-יבאין אל-מנוחתתי:		4 4 4
Total, v. 11		7 = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7
Strophe 5 Total, v. 10-11		20 = 12 + 8 = 13 + 7
Words spoken by God: Canto II, v. 8-11		34 = 19 + 15 = 20 + 14
Total, v. 1-11		89 = 49 + 40 = 43 + 46

Observations

1. In terms of the 89 words of the poem, the 3 words in v. 7a constitute its arithmetic centre (89 = 43 + 3 + 43). The middle words coincide precisely with the middle colon (12+1+12), falling within the middle verseline, vs. 6-7a (11 = 5 + 1 + 5):

כי הוא אלהינו For he is our God.

In my judgement, these words form the consciously designed meaningful centre expressing the gist of the poem: the relationship between YHWH and his people.

2. The apparent disagreement between Van der Lugt and myself, on the one hand, and Fokkelman on the other, illustrates the uncertainty among scholars about the structure of vs. 6-7. Fokkelman, to begin with, takes v. 6 and v. 7a-c as two bicolic verselines:

באו נשתחווה ונכרעה נברכה לפני יהוה עשנו:⁶
כי הוא אלהינו ואנחנו עם מרעיתו וצאן ידיו^{7a-c}

At the same time, he regards the last four words of v. 7 as a separate verseline, which he joins with 8-9 to constitute his Strophe 4 (7d-9):

היום אם-בקלו תשמעו:^{7c}
אל-תקשו לבבכם כמריבה כיום מסה במדבר:⁸
אשר נסוני אבותיכם בחנוני גם-ראו פעלי:⁹

However, the four words of v. 7d (MT) cannot possibly be separated from v. 7a-c (MT), since they strictly belong to the words of the prophet in vs. 1-7.

Van der Lugt, on his part, rightly finds 25 cola and 11 verselines, deviating from MT by regarding vs. 6-7a and 7b-d as two tricollic verselines. Taking 7a as belonging to v. 6 he regards 7b-d (MT) as "a break-up of a stereotyped phrase (cf. Pss. 79,13a and 100,3c)", which he recognizes as a tricollic verseline (7b-d):

בֹּאֵי נִשְׁתַּחֲוּהוּ וְנִכְרַעְתֶּהּ⁶ נִבְרָכָה לְפָנֵי־יְהוָה עֲשֵׂנוּ:^{7a} כִּי הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וַיִּנְחֵנוּ עִם מְרִעִיתוֹ וְצֹאן יִדְוֶה הַיּוֹם אִם־בְּקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמָעוּ:^{7b-d}

According to this division, the last four words form an integral part of the prophet's call to worship (vs. 1-7). I agree with Van der Lugt's restructuring of vs. 6-7. The words in v. 7a are after all phrased as the prophet's words, not God's. The oracle starts only in v. 8.

Having said enough about Fokkelman's division of vs. 6-7 as untenable, let us now consider in greater depth the problem of the major division of the text into two cantos.

Van der Lugt's canto division (vs. 1-5 and vs. 6-11) rests on his observation that Psalms 95, 96 and 97 show a rather similar framework. The first part of each poem deals with God's greatness *in heaven*, particularly in relation with the 'gods' and as Creator (95:1-5; 96:1-6; 97:1-6). The second part of each poem, on the other hand, is about *the earth*, about history and God's judgement on the nations (95:6-11; 96:7-13; 97:7-12). If the major framework of these psalms were indeed based on the two categories in question, there would be something to say for Van der Lugt's division.

However, this is only to a certain extent true, for in the 'heaven'-passages in Pss. 95:1-5, 96:1-6 and 97:1-6 there are unmistakable references to situations on earth. This weakens the argument that the first parts of these psalms deal with 'God's greatness *in heaven*'. It is in my opinion very doubtful whether such spatial considerations have determined the structure of the text in these psalms. Psalm 82 would be a better example of this – see my Analysis of [Psalm 82](#).

My own canto division of Psalm 95 is primarily based on the two main categories in the poem: the *prophet's summons* to the people to praise YHWH and worship him, in which God is spoken *about*, **vs. 1-7 (Canto I)**, and the *oracle*, where God himself speaks, **8-11 (Canto II)**. Distinguishing these two categories also rests on unequivocal numerical evidence in regards the conspicuous compositional formulas: The **55** words of Canto I are structured according to the (well-known!) formula: **55 = 23 + 32**, while the **34** words of Canto II are structured according to the significant formula: **34 = 19 + 15**.

What has been said earlier strongly suggests that there is an unmistakable caesura between **vs. 1-7** and **vs. 8-11**. This does not rule out the specific function of 7c, which clearly serves as a bridge between the prophet's exhortation and YHWH's oracle. In fact, these four words, spoken by the prophet, clearly introduce the divine speech.

There is ample numerical evidence confirming this particular division of the text.

First, the fact that the prophet's exhortation in **vs. 1-7** is made up of **55** words divided into precisely **23** in the main clauses and **32** in the subordinate clauses, strongly suggests authorial intent: the deliberate use of the double *kabod* formula, **55 = 23 + 32**, as compositional device. For this widely used compositional formula, which represents the presence of God, see the [General Introduction](#) under "Special Patterns".

Apart from the use of the conjunction כִּי, occurring in vs. 3a and 7a, the deliberate use of syntax to structure the text becomes apparent when we consider the no less than 4 occurrences of the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר (4a, 5a, 9a, 11a), which is exceptional in poetry.

Second, the oracle in **vs. 8-11** is an undeniable literary unity, consisting of exactly **34** words, with **19** before, and **15** after atnach, structured according to a most significant compositional formula **34 = 19 + 15**. Moreover, on verse and verseline level, the psalm is clearly structured in the well-known pattern **11 = 7 + 4**, as in [Psalm 46](#). So there is no reason to doubt the correctness of the canto division of the text into vs. 1-7 and 8-11.

3. I encountered the latter most intriguing compositional formula, **34 = 19 + 15**, for the first time in Deut. 1:34-40, where it occurs twice (in vs. 35-36 and vs. 38-39) in the four corresponding arms of the beautiful concentric menorah structure. See for particulars, my commentary *Deuteronomium* (De Prediking van het Oude Testament, Nijkerk 1987), Vol. 1A, p. 40 and 130-132, as well as the Supplement, p. 10.

Let me display the astoundingly intricate menorah pattern of this 95-word section:

1:34	YHWH's response to Israel's lack of faith		8	
1:35	No entrance in Canaan for the old generation		15	
1:36	Entrance for Kaleb who shall occupy it	34	19	
1:37	No entrance for Moses	11		34 34
1:38	Entrance for Joshua to help Israel occupy it		15	
1:39	Entrance for the young generation	34	19	
1:40	Israel commanded to turn and set out		8	

Both sections directly on either side of the **11**-word centre, vs. 35-36 and vs. 38-39, are structured according to the fixed formula **34 = 15 + 19**. Additionally, the corresponding arms v. **35** and v. **39**, as well as v. **36** and v. **38**, also contain this formula! The passage deals explicitly with the crucial issue of apostasy, which fundamentally determines the entrance or non-entrance into the promised land. Most strikingly, the arithmetical centre of the text, v. 37 is made up of exactly **11** words, the number of fulfilment. For the structuring function of **11**, see Pieter van der Lugt, "Speech-Cycles in the Book of Job", VT 56 (2006), pp. 554-557, and my *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, pp. 57-73.

The formula **34 = 15 + 19** was apparently used as an archetype in the book of Psalms.

[Psalm 95](#) was the first example of its use I discovered outside the book of Deuteronomy: the formula **34 = 19 + 15** is to be found in the **34**-word oracle (**95:8-11**) which divides into **19** words in the admonitory oracle, and **15** in the divine resolution quoted in the oracle (see the chart). The formula is skilfully repeated, as we have already noted, in the number of words before and after atnach: **19** (column a) and **15** (column b). The second occurrence of the formula not only corroborates this particular division; it also demonstrates deliberate intent on the part of the author.

Important to note is that the passage deals with apostasy and that there is a clear reference to the land issue in v. 11!

[Psalm 106](#) is another evident example: vs. 23-27 deal explicitly with the disastrous consequences of Israel's apostasy: the loss of the land and the Diaspora. The **34** words of the passage divide into **19** words before and **15** after atnach. At the same time, the **34** words divide into **17** in vs. 23-24 and **17** in vs. 25-27.

[Psalm 105](#) which apparently preludes on what will be said more specifically in 106:23-27, is a further example. In Canto IV (vs. 40-45) a part of the text, the **34**-word section of vs. 40-44, is composed according to the **34 = 19 + 15** formula which cannot simply be dismissed as a matter of coincidence. There are clear references to Israel's apostasy in the desert, and the passage concludes with a reference to the promised land.

[Psalm 107](#), the sister psalm of 105 and 106, is a very special case. The formula **34 = 19 + 15** occurs in the last five verses marked by the inverted nun: vs. 23-26 + 40. The first four verses deal with God's judgement on "those who go to sea in ships", while v. 40 is about the contempt he pours upon the princes. The reason why the Masoretes conjoined these verses by means of inverted *nun* and this particular formula remains a mystery.

[Psalm 81](#) is yet another example. In Canto II (vs. 9-15, the second oracle), a certain section of the text (vs. 9-12, the divine admonition) is structured according to the stereotyped formula **34 = 19a + 15b**. There is an unambiguous reference to Israel's apostasy in the desert in v. 12. Like in Psalm 106, the **34** words also divide into **17** words in each of the two sections (vs. 9-10 and 11-12).

[Psalm 77](#) may be mentioned too, as my final example, at least for the time being. When I was revising my logotechnical Analysis of this psalm – after I had written the present Observation - I noticed that the formula in question occurs in vs. 8-12, a section of Canto II (vs. 8-13). It is composed of **34** words, with **15** before and **19** after atnach, and clearly alludes to apostasy and its consequences. See Obs. 6 in my Analysis of Psalm 77.

In the book of **Deuteronomy** I encountered the formula also in 7:5-6 and 25-26. Both passages deal with the destruction of pagan cult objects after the occupation of the land. This did not surprise me, seeing the inextricable connection between idolatry and the loss of the land! In vs. 5-6 the **34** words divide into **15** before and **19** after atnach. In vs. 25-26 they divide into **19** in v. 25 and **15** in v. 26.

In sum, there are no less than ten cognate texts (as regards material content) dealing explicitly or implicitly with apostasy and the land issue, which are all structured by the same compositional formula **34 = 19 + 15** (or v.v.)!

Up to the present, we are completely in the dark regarding the reason behind this specific division of these texts into 15 + 19 (or v.v.). However, it would be worthwhile to study all texts dealing with the land issue elsewhere in the O.T. to see whether there are more examples of the explicit use of this mysterious formula. Compare, e.g., Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 136](#).

4. Worth noting is how the divine name numbers have been woven into the text, in addition to the use of the two strict compositional formulas ($55 = 23 + 32$ and $34 = 19 + 15$):
 - vs. 1-5 **17** words after atnach
 - vs. 6-8 **26** words in total, divided into **15** before, and **11** after atnach
 - vs. 7-9 **26** words in total, divided into **15** before, and **11** after atnach
5. The word **אלהים** occurs twice (vs. 3b and 7a), and **אל** once (v. 3a). The name **יהוה** features three times (vs. 1, 3 and 6). Most significantly, in Psalms 90-100, the **63** occurrences of the divine name YHWH/YH show the pattern $63 = 26 + 3 + 34$:

Psalm 90	1	}	26
Psalm 91	2		
Psalm 92	15		
Psalm 93	5		
Psalm 94	11	}	17
Psalm 95	3		
Psalm 96	11	}	34
Psalm 97	6		
Psalm 98	6		
Psalm 99	7		
Psalm 100	4	}	17

The distribution of the divine name over these eleven psalms in this fashion underscores the supposition (put forward by Pieter van der Lugt) that Psalms 90-100 form a distinct sub-group, with Psalm 95 positioned at the centre. See the [Introduction to Book IV](#).